

SUMMER FARE

by Connie Tucker

Summer means eating light. When temperatures rise, appetites wane. Heavy meals don't appeal to most of us this time of year, and because they put a significant burden on our bodies to digest them we tend to seek out lighter fare. Here are a few ideas that might increase enjoyment of summer meals.

Ramen Noodle Salad

Crunchy, tangy, and refreshing! And it won't heat up the kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 (16 ounce) bag coleslaw mix
1 package ramen noodles, crushed
1 oriental flavor seasoning packet from ramen package
1/2 cup sunflower seeds (I use dry roasted)
1/3 cup oil
1/4 cup cider vinegar
1/3 cup sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Placed dry crushed noodles in a shallow bowl and microwave on high at one-minute intervals, stirring between each, till noodles are lightly toasted.
2. Mix together coleslaw mix, crushed noodles, and sunflower kernels.
3. In a small bowl, mix ramen noodle seasoning, oil, vinegar, and sugar and pour over coleslaw and noodles. Mix and refrigerate at least 2 hours. Add sunflower seeds just prior to serving.

VARIATIONS

1. If you have toasted sesame seed oil on hand, a drizzle or two before serving is wonderful addition.
2. Double the amount of dressing (except one package of seasoning is enough) and marinate a cup of diced or pulled cooked rotisserie chicken breast for about 4 hours in the refrigerator. Drain marinated chicken and add to noodles and vegetables.

Spiedies (pronounced "SPEE-dees")

My husband is from Binghamton, New York, and one summer he took me to the Spiedie Festival. Made popular by Italian immigrants—*spiedo* means "kitchen cooking spit." In Binghamton's industrial heyday in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, "spiedie stands" popped up to feed growing throngs of manufacturing workers in Binghamton, Vestal, Endicott, and Broome County in New York state's southern tier. Many spiedie stands exist today, and spiedies are still a popular dish at local restaurants.

You can buy prepared spiedie sauce at our local grocery store, but it is so easy to whip up your own fresh version, which has a more authentic flavor. Rub the herbs between your finger and thumb before adding in order to release their essential oils. Beef and lamb are traditionally used—even venison, but lean boneless pork is also excellent. If using chicken, reduce marinating time to 3 hours or less. Other meats can be marinated overnight. This recipe makes six sandwiches.

FOR THE MARINADE

2 pounds meat cut into 1½ -inch cubes
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup lemon juice
¼ cup apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons sugar
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 bay leaf
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 ½ teaspoons dried thyme
1 ½ teaspoons dried basil
1 ½ teaspoons dried oregano
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon coarsely ground pepper

FOR THE SAUCE

3 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
1 tablespoon lemon juice

HAVE ON HAND

Loaf of crusty Italian or French bread

DIRECTIONS

1. Make marinade and sauce. Combine marinade ingredients in large bowl. Transfer 2 tablespoons of mixture to separate bowl. Whisk in mayonnaise, vinegar, and lemon juice; refrigerate.
2. Prick meat with fork, cut into 1½ -inch chunks; mix with remaining oil mixture. Depending on meat, refrigerate, covered, for 30 minutes for chicken or up to 24 hours for red meats.
3. On the day, let meat stand at room temperature for 2 hours. Grill on skewers over hot fire, covered, turning frequently until lightly charred and cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes. No grill? Meat can be browned and cooked through in about 8 minutes in a cast iron pan. A ¼ tsp. Wright's Natural Hickory Seasoning® (aka Liquid Smoke) added to the marinade will improve the flavor. Wrap bread around meat and drizzle generously with mayonnaise sauce. Serve immediately.

Barbecued Chinese Chicken Wrap

You can't beat the combination of flavors. Lettuce must be *uber* fresh for the best crunch. Assemble a few hours in advance, and refrigerate. Terrific appetizers or a light summer supper.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups fresh shiitake mushrooms
1 1/3 to 1 1/2 pounds thin-cut chicken breast or tenders
2 tablespoons vegetable or peanut oil
Coarse salt and coarse black pepper
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 inch ginger root, grated or minced pickled ginger (in Asian foods aisle)
1 navel orange, zested
1/2 red bell pepper, diced small

1 small can sliced water chestnuts, drained and chopped
3 scallions, thinly sliced
3 tablespoons hoisin, Chinese barbecue sauce (in Asian foods aisle)
1/2 large head iceberg lettuce, core removed, washed and spun dry
Wedges of navel orange

DIRECTIONS

1. Discard tough stems from mushrooms and slice tops. Chop chicken into small pieces.
2. Preheat a large skillet or wok to high.
3. Add oil to hot pan. Add chicken to the pan and sear by stir frying a minute or two. Add mushrooms and cook another minute or two. Add salt and pepper to season, then garlic and ginger. Cook a minute more.
4. Grate zest into pan, add bell pepper bits, chopped water chestnuts, and scallions. Cook another minute, continuing to stir. Add hoisin sauce and toss to coat.
5. Transfer hot barbecued mix to serving platter, and pile the quartered wedges of crisp iceberg lettuce along side. Add wedged oranges to platter to garnish.
6. Pile spoonfuls into lettuce leaves, wrapping in thirds around fillings. Squeeze an orange wedge over top to enhance.